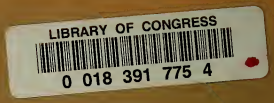
PS 3537
.E94 C5
1919


LIBRARY OF CONGRESS
0 018 391 775 4

Hollinger Corp.
pH 8.5

PS 3537
E94 C5
1919
Copy 1

Chronicles of Bagdad

An Oriental Fantasy

By
Abdu'l Hassan

CHICAGO
THE BOOKFELLOWS
1919

This book published from time to time in sixteen-page installments and issued to Bookfellows. Three hundred copies printed from type by Luther Albertus Brewer, Bookfellow No. 14. The first section printed in October 1919.

Copyright 1919 by
Flora Warren Seymour

THE TORCH PRESS
CEDAR RAPIDS
IOWA

OCT 29 1919

©CL.A536778

To Abbas Effendi
in memory of many happy days spent
together fishing in the Euphrates

For permission to reprint the essay, "On Walking Down the Street," we are indebted to the Damascus *Democrat*; for "On the Perils of Aviation," to the Aleppo *Plain Speaker*; for "On the Disadvantages of Being Prepared," to the Mesopotamia *Times;* for "On Worshipping Strange Gods," to the *Orthodox Mohammedan* of Diarbekr; for "On Not Answering Letters," to the *Arabian Housewife*; all the others have appeared in the Bagdad *Evening News*, to which due acknowledgment is made.

IN BAGDAD

In Bagdad when the world is still
And night is overhead,
The prison yard is damp and chill,
The graves give up their dead,
And he who walks on Gallows Hill
Strange shapes will meet, 'tis said.

In Bagdad when the summer sun
His golden madness flings,
The dusty ways with frolic run,
The very desert sings;
A revel-tide of mirth and fun
Infects the dullest things.

In Bagdad when a lady fair
Admits her lover's claim,
It thrills him to each tingling hair,
Each sense it sets aflame.
In Bagdad? Aye, and everywhere
Methinks 'tis much the same.

CHRONICLES OF BAGDAD

I

ON WALKING DOWN THE STREET

A MAN may accomplish much by walking down the street.

I have made this epigram by way of variation of Anthony Trollope's saying, that a man may accomplish much by fastening himself to the seat of his chair with cobbler's wax.

If mere inertia is productive of results, how much more may be expected from mobility! For instance, by walking down the street one may see what They are wearing. If the street be aptly chosen, so that its pronouncement on the subject may be relied upon as authoritative, one may also see what They are doing. This is highly desirable, not only for its positive results, but also for its subjective effect. Arthur Train in his epic of criminal practice, *The Prisoner at the Bar*, says:

"Observation has ceased to be necessary and has taken its place among the lost arts."

When this amazing judgment was first given to the world it aroused a storm of excitement in Bagdad. The Sanhedrin, whose members were widely scattered (some of them houseboating on the Tigris, others

visiting the bungalows of relatives in the Caucasus Mountains), was hastily convened and urged to go into the question. The Seven Wise Men sought its cause in the intensive study of Omar Khayyam. The Summer School of Philosophy announced a university extension research course on the subject, with prizes for the best three theses. But all in vain. The true explanation came from a most unexpected quarter, but it was no sooner uttered than it was universally accepted. Its discoverer was Ben Ali, an Egyptian beggar who made his headquarters in the vestibule of the palace and whose profession allowed him much time for mathematical and philosophical study. His conclusion was that it was due to a falling-off of the practice of walking down the street.

He was heard to utter this epoch-making verity, it seems, quite incidentally, by the Spanish Ambassador who was sauntering by to an audience with the Grand Vizier. Now, the Spanish never hurry, and consequently with them the art of walking down the street is not an *ars perdita.* Therefore when His Excellency arrived at the vestibule, being then three-quarters of an hour late and no slave of time, he stopped to examine those famous mosaics, the work of the great artist Hafiz, with which the ceiling, walls and floor are so profusely adorned. In this way he chanced to notice the beggar, and having noticed him took out his pocketbook to give him a dinar, for the Spanish are as liberal with their money as they are with other people's time, and it was in the course of doing this good deed that he heard the famous dictum.

It must be conceded that the Spanish Ambassador was a man of great penetration, for he had studied philosophy at the University of Barcelona under Cervantes, so the world-wide applicability of the formula struck him at once. He felt like another Archimedes discovering the secret of specific gravity. He dropped his pocketbook and fled into the courtyard where some slave girls were feeding the Caliph's monkeys, and his sudden appearance with all the indicia of intense excitement that he was able to assume upon such short notice caused great consternation among them. It is true that His Excellency was not equal to the carrying out of the Archimedes simile in all its completeness for, since he had not been in the act of bathing, he had no reasonable excuse for presenting himself otherwise than in full street costume. Furthermore, since the lower order of Arabians are very ignorant beings and little versed in Greek, he felt that to shout "Eureka!" would simply be a waste of effort, which is contrary to a Spaniard's principles, so he contented himself with the announcement that something very important had just happened. The slave girls, being persons of extremely limited comprehension, seeing that the Ambassador had just come from the direction of the palace in a state of great agitation, could ascribe but one cause to it, and so originated the rumor, perfectly baseless at that time, that Madame Fatima had presented the Caliph with an heir to the throne.

Even then the matter might not have gone any further but for the fact that Doctor Ibrahim, a

learned Jew who had been under examination by the Grand Vizier on the subject of his orthodoxy, chanced to emerge from the palace and saw the Ambassador, completely exhausted from his efforts, leaning against the railing and pressing his hands to his sides. The Doctor helped him to a seat on the steps and began the application of restoratives which, aided by the ordinary course of nature, quickly produced their effect.

As soon as the Ambassador could speak he embraced his rescuer and kissed him on the beard.

"Eureka!" he exclaimed, heartily. "It is found at last! I have the secret of the whole matter!"

"What!" cried the Jew. "Not the — ?"

"Yes," replied the Ambassador; "the identical — !"

And so the Jew, filled with enthusiasm for this great new discovery, though temporarily overlooking the details of it, rushed past the gatekeeper and into the roadway, gesturing and shouting inarticulately.

Then it was that the Grand Vizier himself, annoyed at the delay of the Ambassador in keeping his appointment and fearing that he might have been diverted to the study of botany or of human nature, for which many choice subjects were to be found in the environs of the palace, came to the door with a look of anxiety on his noble features. On beholding the Ambassador seated on the lower step a suspicion crossed his mind that the envoy of His Spanish Majesty had abandoned the profession of diplomacy in favor of the equally honorable one of alms-gathering and he prepared to toss him a dinar, but withheld his benev-

olence when the Ambassador rose and, bowing profusely, said:

"Know, O most worthy moon of the great Sun of Bagdad, that, however unworthy my person and reprehensible my conduct, I have that within my mind which may abate a tittle of the punishment justly due me. I know the Great Secret!"

"What!" cried the Vizier. "You mean that you have discovered the cause of the decline of observation?"

"Not discovered, your Worship, but learned. I have it from a ragged beggar who sits in the vestibule. It is that Arabia, as a nation, has lost its proficiency at walking down the street!"

"Astounding!" exclaimed the Vizier. "This shall be communicated at once to the University. But elaborate on the subject. Point out the relation of cause and effect."

"It is simple," replied the Ambassador. "The practice of walking down the street, as it was indulged in by our forefathers, stopping now and then to examine the wares of merchants or to gossip with acquaintances, cultivates the faculty of observation. The street is a public place, accessible to all the people — no other locality provides such excellent facilities on so large a scale. The confirmed street denizen becomes a philosopher in spite of himself, for one cannot be brought in contact with so many of the facts of life without reacting to them. In ancient Greece these people were called Peripatetics and were looked up to by all classes of society until their leader

became so overbearing that he was forced to drink hemlock to cure his audacity."

"Superb!" was the Vizier's comment. "Steps shall be taken to revive this ancient custom at once. A proclamation shall be issued in the name of the Caliph — whom Heaven preserve! — calling upon all able-bodied citizens between the ages of twelve and sixty-five to appear afoot on the streets of Bagdad for from one to three hours each day, according to their means and station in life, and to assume toward one another and toward the world in general a kindly, inquisitive attitude, freely asking for information and as freely giving it when asked, under penalty for forfeiture of goods for the venial offender and imprisonment and torture for the more serious cases."

The wise men of the empire were summoned and the matter explained to them at length, and in view of the fact that the Grand Vizier had already made up his mind on the subject they were unanimous in commending it. But when they proceeded to the vestibule to look for the beggar in order that he might be properly rewarded it was found that he had disappeared, and many to this day hold to the opinion that Ben Ali was simply a cloak invented by the Spanish Ambassador to cover his own modesty.

The Ambassador's pocketbook, which he had discarded in the vestibule, disappeared also, and Ben Ali, who turned up nearly a week later, when questioned under the bastinado disclaimed all knowledge of it, though credible witnesses reported that they had seen him, with several boon companions, fre-

The Bookfellow Series
Extra Volume

Chronicles of Bagdad

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS
0 018 391 775 4

E94 C5
1919

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS
0 018 391 775 4

Hollinger Corp.
pH 8.5